

## MR. FREEMAN'S IMPRESSIONS, ESPECIALLY AS TO AMERICAN NEWS-PAPERS.

FROM THE REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE TRIBUNE.  
LONDON, April 4.

Mr. Freeman's "Some Impressions of the United States," which Messrs. Longman have just issued in a neat 12mo. volume, is something more than a reprint of the impressions which have appeared in two of the English magazines. The substance of those articles is here, together, says the author, with an amount of new matter at least as large as the articles themselves. Large parts of the magazine papers have been republished in America, and there is nothing in the present volume to distinguish the new from the old matter. All of it, I will venture to say, is of interest to the American; errors as well as truths; but the only section I can say a word about this morning is that on American newspapers. The newspaper is a subject on which Mr. Freeman is interesting because he is not an expert; a truth which to him will not seem the less a truth because it is clothed in the garb of a paradox. We are all—men and women—too much disposed to look at a newspaper with a purely professional eye. The office opinion rules. But the opinion of the public is surely more important, and more decisive than that of the few men who are concerned in the production of newspapers. Mr. Freeman is one of the public. He is one of the most positive men now living, takes strong views, and the reason of his mistakes is commonly worth finding out. When he happens to be right, he is right in a very convincing way.

Now American newspapers, says Mr. Freeman, are very characteristic of America in the sense of being unlike all other newspapers, as America is unlike all other countries. But they are not characteristic in the more usual sense of the word, because, alas, "there is no country which it would be more unfair to judge of by its newspapers." The higher class of American papers represent a level of American life lower than the level of English life which is represented by the English newspapers. This is painful if true. Mr. Freeman, who has a jury-lawyer's habit of saying the same thing over and over again, to the end that the dull-witted may not miss his meaning, puts it again with more force: "Of the American daily papers one may fairly say that the very best do not come near to representing the thoughts and feelings of the best class of Englishmen." The gap, he is afraid, is wider in the American case; a remark which perhaps saves of mild relativity. It will not do to judge newspapers by the standard which is a fitting one for literature on the one hand, or the drawing-room on the other.

Mr. Freeman's first complaint of American newspapers is, naturally enough, their personality. He goes so far as to call it vulgar personality, and explains that by this he does not mean merely speaking evil of people; he means "a vulgar personal gossip of every kind." He is willing to admit that Kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers must pay the penalty of their greatness in being more talked about than other men. But in American daily newspapers, everybody is talked about; the obscurest people have to endure discussions and jests upon their personal affairs and peculiarities; gossip such as is certainly never seen in a decent English daily paper about Mr. Gladstone. Of the so-called society journal in England, Mr. Freeman has heard, but it is not to them he is referring. He regards them as a very unpleasant invention, or rather re-vival, and has not a good word to say for them. So much the harder is his condemnation of the American press when he declares that the foremost daily papers play the part of a society paper, and a very inferior society paper at that. With the risk of that lash laid smartly on your back, you will not be unduly elated if I quote what Mr. Freeman pre-  
cays to say about you:

"I suppose that taking one thing with another, the New-York Tribune is the best of the American daily papers. It would stand high anywhere both for ability and for character. But even the New-York Tribune admits personal paragraphs which would certainly never find their way into *The Times*, *The Daily News*, or *The Standard*."

In which circumstances it may be a balm to your wounds to know that one of your neighbors is worse than you are in the matter of personality. The personal paragraphs of *The New-York Herald* are a "by-word." It is not, however, the remorseless Mr. Freeman, "that they are always scurrilous; it is their extreme silliness that strikes more than anything else." And he finds it hard to conceive for what kind of people they can be written: "certainly not for the kind of people with whom I spent my time in America." Yet even for *The Herald* Mr. Freeman has a good word. It is the only American paper which gives a systematic, though often meager and confused, account of general European affairs; the collection of American news is wonderful; it is a marvel of successful enterprise; but its literary level is low, and I wonder whether Mr. Freeman ever heard the story (mythical or otherwise) of the elder Bennett's decisive answer to the friend who asked him why his paper was not better written. "Better written! D—n it, man, *The Herald* is written for men who can't read." But that was long ago.

Mr. Freeman's second explanation of the inferiority of the American newspaper to the English is that there is no American London. The London paper aspires to be national; made to be read and understood all over the country, and over the world even, and hence leaves local news to a purely local press, and wisely and honorably eschews more personal gossip. "But no American paper can have this national character, because no American city—hear it, ye New-Yorkers!—is a national centre in the sense in which London is." London, avers Mr. Freeman, not without truth, is New-York, Washington, and the capital of each man's own State rolled into one. He actually makes it a ground of criticism that the New York papers publish New-York news; notwithstanding which little blemish they "come nearer than any other to the character of national papers." The remark about the national character of the London papers is perfectly accurate in a sense, and their calm indifference to all London news which is not Parliamentary or social might be painted in stronger colors. At the same time they have over and over again proved themselves out of touch with the great body of the nation they aspire to represent and to guide. Their influence in what they call the provinces is now secondary rather than direct. They influence more or less members of Parliament and other news-papers. Twenty years ago they were all but omnipotent in the world of English journalism. *The Times* was a power in Manchester not less than in London. For reasons which I have stated before now, and cannot stop to repeat, they have let this authority to a greater extent slip away from them, and they are not likely to recover it. But they do retain the pontifical tone which they took in their days of wider power. They preach withunction *ubi et obi*. They ignore the great papers of Manchester, of Leeds, of Newcastle, of Edinburgh; some of which are their equals in ability and rancor. Their loftiness of aim is a distinct advantage, and if their knowledge of the country equalled their pretensions to direct its fortunes, their power would be vastly greater than it is.

Another cause to which Mr. Freeman ascribes in part the inferiority of the American press leads him on still more delicate ground. American news-papers do not by preference adapt themselves to the highest tastes, but to the average taste. "The refined and cultivated class have to put up with it, but it is another class for whom it is directly meant." This is only another way of saying that the refined and cultivated class is not in America the most potent. It is not in politics, he has already said; and it is not strong enough to compel the news-papers to aim at its own standard of culture and thought. In journalism as in politics the majority rules; it is the majority to which the daily paper has to address itself; and of this great American majority Mr. Freeman says that it has a certain amount of education, but of education without cultivation—a remark which goes very deep. Here in England, on the other hand, the aristocracy, driven from its dominant position in political life, is still the commanding class; still gives the

law to society; still forces the daily paper to adapt itself, or try to adapt itself, to the higher tastes. It, however, this is said of the aristocracy, the meaning of the word must be widened, and the commanding class must include men of letters and of science, as well as those whose claims to distinction are hereditary.

**THE SCIENTIFIC ANGLER.** By the late DAVID FISHER. Compiled by his sons and edited by WILLIAM C. HARRIS. Orange Judd Co.

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